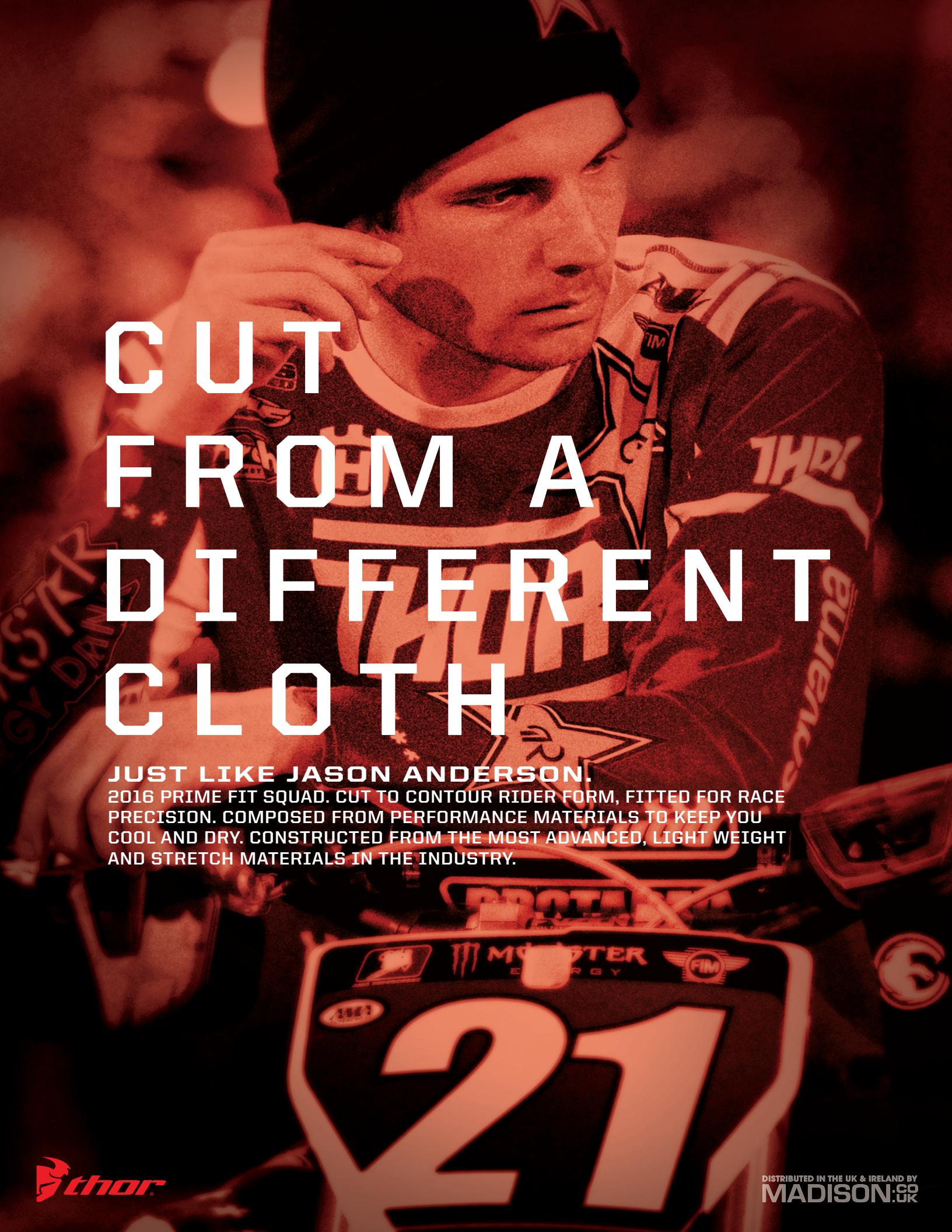


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YOUNG GUNS

Interview Geoff Meyer images J.P. Acevedo

Red Bull KTM Factory rider Jeffrey Herlings once again showed brilliance as he won the Grand Prix of Mexico last week, with 1-1 results. It was a master-class by Herlings who was more calculating than in previous seasons. He finished ahead of Jeremy Seewer with 3-2 and Vsevolod Brylyakov in third with 2-6 results.





"After losing my championship two years ago and come here and dominate is just amazing. Second moto I came out with the win, number 52 already and 49 to go. I have to thank everyone and looking forward to Kegums in two weeks. I mean," Herlings said. "It is a mixed feeling coming back to this track. Losing the championship here was a bummer and I gave it my all. At least I am not racing with a broken femur this time. It is very hot, so we see how it goes. I went down a couple of times last year making stupid mistakes and yesterday I took my time and got to the lead and we just want to go and win, doesn't matter if it's by 20 seconds or one second."

Garibaldi Honda rider Tim Gajser went 2-1 to take his third GP victory of 2016 and his first in Mexico. Gajser finished ahead of Monster Energy Yamaha rider Romain Febvre who scored 1-2 results, and third was Rockstar Energy Husqvarna rider Max Nagl who went 3-3.

"It was nice, the second race," Gajser said. "I enjoyed battling with Romain Febvre, we have a really fast pace and I hope it continues like this, and I want to enjoy it like I am now. Actually the first moto was also good, I had problems with the bike, with the plastic on my radiator. I went into a rut and caught the plastic. I don't want to say Romain won because of the problem, he won and I didn't."

Gajser and Febvre have now won all but one of the 10 moto's run in 2016. Only Nagl has won a moto, taking the opening moto in Argentina last week.

MXGP red plate owner Romain Febvre of the Monster Energy Yamaha team made the perfect return from his accident riddled GP in Argentina, by winning the opening moto of the MXGP class in Mexico.

"I am really happy," Febvre said. "The weekend didn't start well and I was struggling Saturday and we didn't change the bike, because I knew it was me and not the bike."











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THE QUESTION

Interview Geoff Meyer images J.P. Acevedo

He has been the king of the Grand Prix scene for more than a decade. The Sicilian Antonio Cairoli is possibly at the end of his reign. Of course greats like Cairoli can come back, and he will without question win more GP's, but his stranglehold on the MXGP class looks like it's over. Will he win another world motocross championship? Nobodies knows. I sure would love to see him get his ninth, but a part of me wants Stefan Everts to remain at the very top of the winners list.









When Antonio Cairoli battled with Ben Townley and Tyla Rattray in the 2004 GP of Valkenswaard, I am many others thought we saw something special. By seasons end it was of course Townley who would win the MX2 championship, but it was Cairoli who would move into legendary status with 8 world championships in 10 years. An amazing effort for a rider from the very south of Italy.

Not a single GP victory in nearly a year. If you had said that about Antonio Cairoli a year ago people would have laughed in your face.

Two moments that stand out this year for me, was Valkenswaard when Cairoli was hunted down by Romain Febvre and lost out, and his performance in Mexico a week ago. Both occasions the performances were not Cairoli like. Excuses in any sport are just not acceptable and I don't want to make excuses for his current performances, because at the end of the day a rider makes a mistake, gets injured and has no excuse.

"I didn't feel so good all weekend (in Mexico). The track is very difficult compared to last week (in Argentina) when I was feeling comfortable, and better than I had before that. I had a very bad start in the first moto, but I came back to sixth, which was not so bad, but for sure not what I expected. The second moto was really not good. The riding was not how I wanted it, there were a lot of mistakes and also another bad start. It was just a weekend to forget. Hopefully we can be stronger and stronger over the next two weeks. I want to be in good shape and in the mood to attack for Latvia because that's a track I like a lot."

Now onto Kegums and Latvia. It was here last year that I spoke to Antonio and he mentioned his season was just about done. Let's hope this year it's the start of his return to the top of the MXGP championship.



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UNWANTED BEGINNING

Interview Geoff Meyer images J.P. Acevedo

Monster Energy Kawasaki rider Clement Desalle is having the worst season of his career. After five rounds of the FIM MXGP championship the Belgian is 12th in the standings with just 79 points. A pre-season injury causing him to enter the season only maybe 30% of his capabilities. Here is how his season has gone to date.









Qatar

"For sure it was a tough race, mentally and physically. I knew that I didn't come here for a podium, or even a top five, less than two weeks after my injury. Before coming Qatar I had some examinations to be sure that there would not be any risks for my health and my body; my goal was to score one or two points and that's what happened. I knew that it would be tough, and it was, especially on jump landings. We are on a road race circuit here in Qatar; for sure if I was racing on asphalt that would have been easier this weekend. The season is long so I want to stay positive and I will take it race by race; of course I hope to be fit as soon as possible and to have some fun riding my bike. I go back home during the week; I will visit my doctor for some other examinations and then will be back for Thailand."

Thailand

"I came the round two with the same spirit as in Qatar, and it's really not easy to race like that after so many days of hard work in winter time. But that's how it is; I came here to score a few points and I got a few more than in Qatar. It's not easy to race when it's so hot, and it was tough physically, especially in the second race, due I think to the anaesthetic. I had to be happy with five points in the first race, but in the second moto it was so difficult that I was so close to stopping four or five times.... I made two small mistakes, but the positive point is that my arm was not too painful and I know that I didn't damage it. Honestly it was tough to recover from surgery, and then to fly so far twice for these two GPs, with some jetlag too, but I have no regrets about my decision; maybe these nine points will be important later in the season. Now I need some rest, and then I will listen to my body before getting back into physical training; for sure I will not be fit for Valkenswaard, but I just hope that I will be able to ride my bike one or two times before this third round."

Holland

"I had two good weeks of physical training and just a few hours of training on

the bike before coming here, but unfortunately I was not in the best shape as I got a cold this week. I had a good feeling on the bike, and gave my best in both races; I know that I could do much better if I was in good shape, but I still don't have enough power in my arm and can't work miracles. I don't know if I'm just plain unlucky or what after this problem on the last lap of the second race. I just hope that everything will come together as soon as possible so we can get some podiums again in a near future."

Argentina

"I had some good lap times in the practice session, but in the qualifying race Bobryshev crashed just in front of me and I couldn't avoid him; I had to come back from last to ninth. Today I had a good start in the first race and was in the top five, but after fifteen minutes I could feel the effect of not being able to ride my bike so much since my accident and I had to slow down. I finished seventh; for sure I'd like better results but I don't want to take stupid risks as I'm still recovering. The second race was similar with a good rhythm in the first laps, but then I lost some positions. I know that soon I will be able to train normally; for sure it's always difficult to wait as I want to win races and score podiums."

Mexico

"I had a decent race day here in Mexico; with two top five finishes I got fifth overall and that's not so bad as I'm still far from my best level and we can see that the level of the MXGP is higher than in the past. I did my best again this weekend and it's nice to see that I can improve my results each weekend, even if I couldn't ride the bike this week as we did not return to Europe. I'm pretty happy with the result; as I said last week I want to fight for podium results as soon as possible and we're on the way. I missed riding my bike in the week; for sure when I'm back home I will be able to train normally to prepare for the next GPs as we have three races in a row. I'm also happy for the team; they worked hard and this weekend we got a decent result and of course we can soon expect even better."



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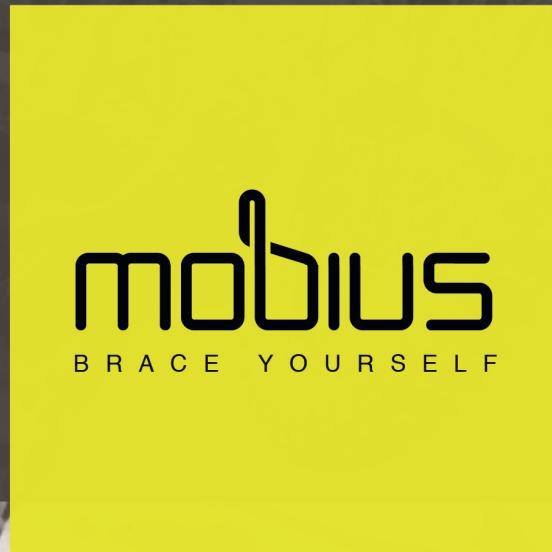
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FLIGHTING ON

Interview Geoff Meyer images J.P. Acevedo

Rockstar Energy Husqvarna Factory Racing's Christophe Charlier is making slow progress in his 2016 assault on the MXGP championship. The Frenchman who is presently 13th in the championship points with 72 points might not be among the contenders, but he is working hard to try and get into the top ten in the elite class. Last weekend in Mexico, Charlier scored 17 points, but he is still working on improving his race fitness after an early season injury.

"I crashed in the qualifying race and had a bad gate pick for the final moto's. I tried not to let that affect me and focused on consistently putting in fast laps. I'm still working on my physical condition but I can honestly say I'm getting closer to where I want to be in every race. We are now going back home in Belgium for a few weeks and my plan is to work as hard as I can for the following GP in Latvia. The feeling is good, I enjoy my time racing the FC 450 and I'm positive the results will soon start coming our way."

The previous week in Argentina Charlier felt like he was making good progress, and his haul of 20 points proved that.

"Physically I was feeling a bit closer to where I want to be and the pain from my injuries was almost non-existent. For me the Grand Prix in Argentina was even tougher than the previous one in The Netherlands. The most important thing is that I now start enjoying myself again on the bike and I know this will slowly pay off in terms of results. My goal is to keep building on my physical conditioning so that I can be able to keep pushing until the end of each moto. But everything keeps getting better as the season goes on. I'm feeling super positive going to Mexico now. The track there is hard-packed and that

suits my riding style a lot more."

Despite his somewhat lack of being comfortable in sand, Charlier fought hard at Valkenswaard and was able to build on his opening two rounds in Qatar and Thailand.

"We had done a lot of work with the team since Thailand and it paid off. I also had the chance to do some races in the sand in preparation for this GP and it helped a lot. Sand is not my strongest point but I fought really hard today and I think the results prove we've made some steps in the right direction. I had a big crash in the first moto, which didn't allow me to fight for a place inside the top 15. Then in the second moto I got a good start and rode to 10th at the finish. Another positive to take away from this round was that I managed to improve on my starts. I was inside the top 12 after the start in both moto's. I'm really looking forward to the following rounds, and the hard-packed tracks so I can show what I'm capable of."

Now onto Kegums in Latvia, for rounds six of the MXGP championship and a circuit where the Husqvarna factory rider hopes to improve his championship position.







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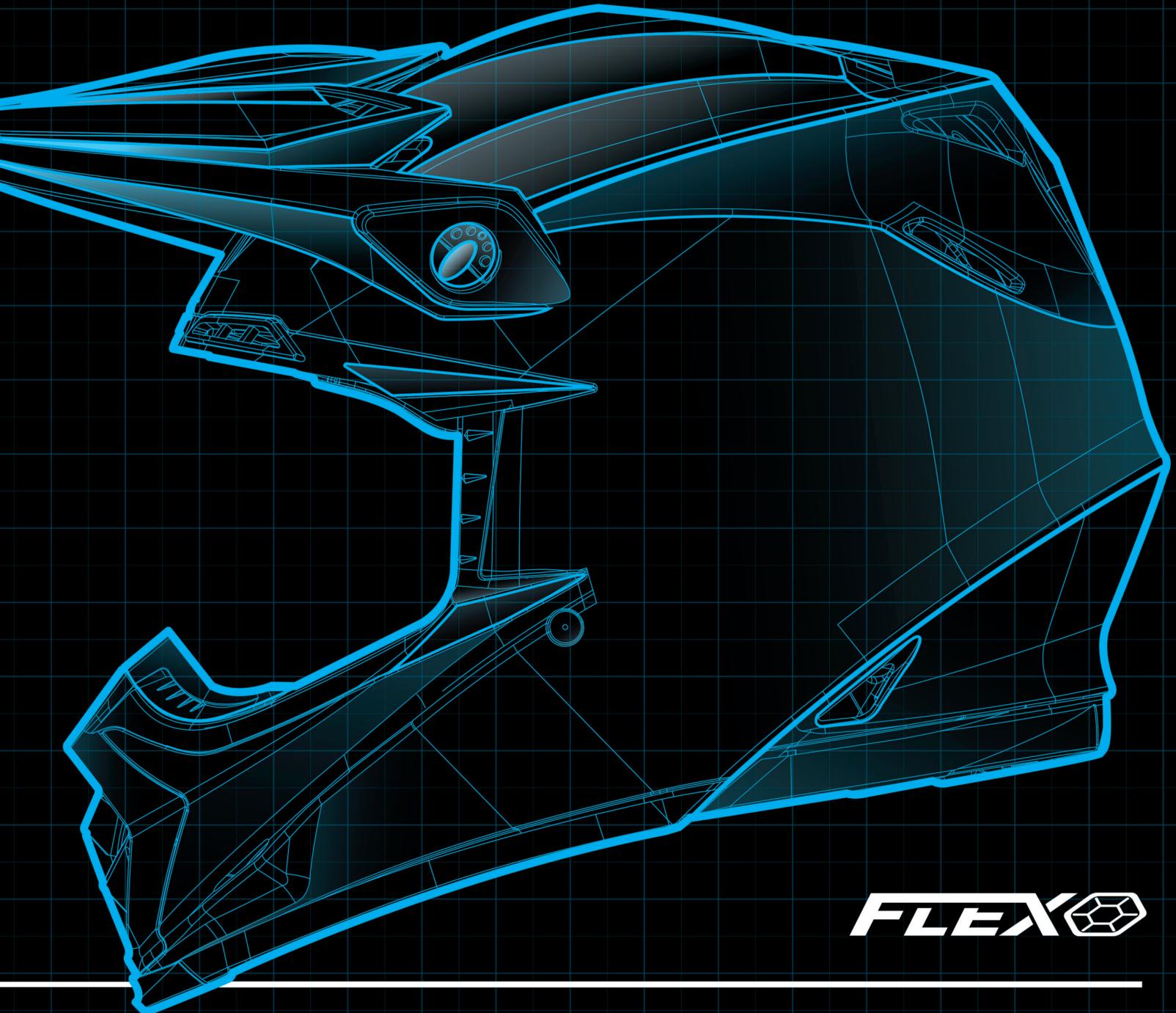
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CHAMPIONS

Interview Geoff Meyer images J.P. Acevedo

The MXGP class is really warming up to something special in 2016. Defending champion Romain Febvre leading the way, and holding the red plate. MX2 champion Tim Gajser sitting a close second in the MXGP points, just three points behind Febvre. After four round these two have owned the top step of the MXGP podium, two GP victories each, Febvre going 3-2-1-1-3-1-6-3 in his eight moto's, and Gajser putting together 1-1-3-5-1-8-3-1 results. Only Max Nagl, who won the opening moto in Argentina has a race win outside these two. If you were a betting man, one of these two would probably be on top of your list.





We all ask is this the new era of Grand Prix motocross, the post Antonio Cairoli era you might say. But then we also have that man in third place in the MXGP points standings, the great Antonio Cairoli.

No current rider in the world has the same statistics as the veteran Italian. Eight world championships, 74 GP wins, and a determination possibly unmatched in GP history. Since 2005 he hasn't lost back to back championships, winning in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. That is the upside, but there is also a downside to his story.

Since a year ago the Sicilian hasn't been on the top step of the MXGP podium, a record long run without a victory for Cairoli. He has struggled with injuries since a crash at the Italian GP at Maggiora in June of last year. A pre-season crash saw him pick up another injury, and since that crash he has been slowly coming back to his best form.

Going 6-4-2-12-7-2-2-2 is the worst racing month Cairoli has had since 2004 (apart from being out injured), and while he is only 28 points behind Febvre and the red plate, it will take a mammoth effort from the multiple world champion to fight back.

What is great about legends though is they have something special in their pocket, like a joker card, or a four leaf clover. I think Cairoli could probably be 60 points behind and you still couldn't write him off, and if MX2 champions from 2014 and 2015 (Jordi Tixier and Tim Gajser) can win their titles after being 100 points behind Jeffrey Herlings, then anything is possible.

I think we might see more questions answered by Cairoli in Latvia this weekend. I get the feeling he will build on his already unsteady season, and going to Germany at the start of May, he might even be a favorite to win that GP. Kegums is a circuit that Cairoli loves.



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